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SMIG, TSPL, EINV  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY SINGAPORE: NO EXPERIENCE ENGAGING  
DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

REF: STATE 86401

¶1. Post does not know of any community of Singaporeans living abroad that would qualify as a "diaspora" using the criteria set forth in reftel paragraph 4. Given that there are no known diaspora communities of Singaporeans, Post is unable to provide meaningful responses to the questions posed in reftel paragraph 15. However, Post offers the following additional observations.

¶2. While there are approximately 180,000 Singaporeans living outside Singapore, our impression is that most emigrants are educated and cosmopolitan people who leave for professional reasons. They are generally free and able to travel between their adopted country and Singapore as often as they please. We doubt there is any such thing as a "collective memory," "homeland myth," or "diasporic consciousness" among Singaporeans living abroad. The Government of Singapore has sometimes expressed concern over a perceived brain drain due to sustained low-level emigration by highly educated Singaporeans, but neither the government nor the public appears to conceptualize this phenomenon as a diaspora issue.

¶3. In one sense (though not in the sense defined by reftel), nearly every Singaporean is a member of a diaspora community, because none of the current inhabitants is descended from the indigenous people of the Malay Peninsula (of whom there are estimated to be less than 200,000 left, and none in Singapore). The ethnic Chinese (75% of the population) immigrated mostly from southern provinces of China when Singapore was a British colony. These immigrants employed several distinct varieties of spoken Chinese. The ethnic Indian population (9%), largely but not uniformly Tamil-speaking, arrived during the same period. The ethnic Malays (14%), who sometimes erroneously refer to themselves as the indigenous people of Singapore, came here before the British arrived, although the experts cannot agree on their true geographic origins. These ethnic communities have preserved many of their respective customs, traditions, and religious observances in Singapore, but they do not appear to think of themselves as members of diasporas. Often, they self-identify as simply Singaporean. Otherwise, they self-identify as Chinese Singaporean, as Indian Singaporean, or as members of a greater Malay "race" who form the majority in neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia and perceive themselves as the rightful masters of the entire peninsula.

¶4. Singapore also contains approximately 1.2 million non-resident foreigners and 480,000 resident foreigners, as compared to a resident citizenry numbering just under 3.2 million. Most of the non-resident foreigners are low-wage workers present without their families on one- or two-year work permits. They generally return to their home countries when their contracts end. It is questionable whether these transient workers form stable communities at all, but they

certainly do not meet reftel's definition of a diaspora. It is more difficult to generalize about the resident foreigners and higher-wage non-resident foreigners. In these categories, no one ethnic group or nationality is obviously dominant, and the Government of Singapore does not publish statistics that could be used to investigate possible group identities.

¶5. Finally, levels of immigration into Singapore are substantial relative to Singapore's small population and low birth rate. In 2008, approximately 79,000 immigrants became Singapore permanent residents, and approximately 20,500 became citizens. Post believes the majority of recent immigrants come from mainland China, but again, there are no published statistics that would permit further analysis. Post has seen no evidence so far of the formation of new diaspora communities within Singapore as a result of recent immigration.

¶6. Embassy Singapore's point of contact for this topic is Political Officer Jeffry W. Duffy. Follow-up questions, if any, may be directed to him at [duffyjlw@state.gov](mailto:duffyjlw@state.gov).

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